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GROUP DISCUSSION AND THE PROBLEMS OF FARM YOUNG PEOPLE

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Group discussion is an extension technique that is being used widely with groups of farm young people. This circular attempts to bring together some of the better discussion procedures used by cooperative extension workers. It has been compiled as an aid in assisting extension workers to help farm young people to conduct their own group discussions.

*This circular is a revision of Extension Service Circular 212, issued in March 1935.

DISTRIBUTION: A copy of this circular has been sent to each State extension director, State and assistant State leader in county agricultural, home demonstration, and club work; county agricultural, home demonstration, and club work; subject-matter specialists in home economics and in home management and furnishings; and to each agricultural-college library and experiment-station library.

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Group discussion is a teaching technique that can be used to improve the thinking ability of those participating. Successful leadership of group discussion is an art that comes from persistent practice. Like skill in extension work or in informal teaching, it comes naturally to a few persons, but with the majority it is a cultivated accomplishment. The discussion method is an effective approach to many of the problems of more mature boys and girls on farms, primarily those who have left school and have not started farming on their own account.

When to Use the Discussion Method

Many of the operations in connection with farm and home enterprises have become highly standardized and can be taught through the demonstration method. Other operations involving a greater degree of managerial ability are not so highly standardized and require the exercise of judgment. Very few situations with reference to the management of a farm or a home as a whole exactly parallel any others. Therefore, decisions cannot be standardized. Judgment has to be exercised to arrive at the more satisfactory ways of meeting these situations. Similarly, plans for farming and for homemaking covering long periods of time cannot be based upon exactly similar experiences and standard set-ups. One way that young people can be aided in such situations is through helping them to improve their thinking ability or basis of judgment.

The differences in extension procedures make an understanding of teaching by the discussion method highly desirable in such situations.

Discussion Method Differentiated

We have on our extension program three different methods of teaching:

(1) The lecture or informing method where the listener has to analyze his own situation, remember what the lecturer said, and make his own application.

(2) The demonstration method which is based upon the principle that the experiment stations through their research work have tested out various ways of meeting a situation and found an answer that can be applied locally. The local demonstration shows the people in the community the answer to their problem. They copy or imitate it.

(3) The discussion method which is primarily useful where a decision is involved or the judgment must be experienced. In all such situations a number of alternatives may be found. The individual must be able to weigh these alternatives accurately as they apply to his or her situation. The ultimate test of the soundness of the decision made is its application to the situation involved. The results of such a test may become known in a few months or not for many years. Many of the situations farm young people have to meet require a decision involving many years for verification.

At a meeting there may be what commonly is considered a discussion, but the teaching technique may be simply (1) informing, (2) demonstrating an improved practice, or (3) a real discussion where constructive thinking is involved.

A young man might describe sickness among his chickens to the extension leader. The leader might (1) tell the boy the name of the disease and the remedy (informing), (2) show the boy how to prevent a recurrence of the disease in the future (demonstrating), or (3) discuss with members of the group the symptoms and causes of the disease, possible remedies, and conditions in the member's flock in order that they might know how to handle their birds if the disease were present (discussing).

A young woman might present the difficulty she is having with her expenditures for clothing. The leader might (1) tell her of a book on home budgets (informing), (2) help her to record her clothing expenditures on a standardized form and to compare them with a typical budget (demonstrating), or (3) discuss with her and other members of the group the place of clothing in the family budget, the relationship of the individual's expenses to those of other members of the family, and arrive at a fair distribution of the family expenses and the place of clothing expenditures in the individual's personal budget (discussing). Illustrations of how different extension procedures have been used to teach different phases of farming and homemaking appear on page 5.

Farm Young People's Problems

Young people who are out of school and at home on farms and who have not married or started farming on their own account, are faced with more situations requiring judgment or the making of decisions than at any other period of their life. The growth of unemployment in nonagricultural occupations has caused a marked increase in the number of young people on farms. This increase has been estimated as at least two million persons. In other words, in most counties there are now as many of these young people as there are farms in the county. Because of this surplus of young people, larger numbers than ever before are faced with the alternative of deciding whether to seek employment in nonagricultural occupations or in agriculture. If this type of problem is to be met successfully, clear concepts are needed of the qualities necessary for these individuals' success in different occupations; of the kind of living various nonagricultural occupations are likely to provide, as well as the type of living that may be obtained from various systems of farming. These young people also are associating with other young people and will be choosing a life mate; many of their ideals as to a future home are being crystallized. If they are to be skilled in making decisions they will need the same kind of practice in reasoning or in formulating judgments as they receive through our present extension program for improving their farm and home practices.

If we are going to help young people to improve their thinking ability we shall have to use an extension technique peculiarly adapted to this teaching situation. The use of the discussion method is advantageous only under

Illustrations of how different extension procedures have been used to teach different phases of farming and homemaking

Extension procedures		
1. Informing (remember)	2. Demonstrating (imitate)	3. Discussing (think)
Listen to radio talk on marketing demands for apples.	Graft or prune trees.	Plan a new orchard.
Read articles on symptoms and remedy for hog cholera.	Vaccinate for hog cholera.	Work out a hog-cholera prevention program.
Listen to potato-outlook talk.	Spray potatoes.	Plan a potato rotation.
Hear lecture on line and color.	Make garments.	Draw up family clothing budget.
Talk on factors for success in poultry management.	Cull poultry.	Plan a poultry flock as a supplementary enterprise.
Attend lecture on saving steps.	Rearrange kitchen equipment.	Plan reorganization of kitchen.
Listen to lectures on etiquette.	Greet guests.	Learn how to conduct an interesting conversation
Talk on parents' and young people's relationships.	Work assignment for a farm.	Draw up partnership agreement.
Read books on the family.	Arrange family work schedule.	Evaluate factors to consider in choosing a mate.
Listen to lectures on food values.	Can sweet corn.	Plan meals for a week.
Listen to lectures on trend in farm wages.	Keep farm records.	Determine fair wage agreement with father.

certain circumstances. Superiority is not in the method itself but in its proper use.

Extension Workers' Part in the Discussion of Farm Young-People Problems

Many procedures have been followed in the use of the discussion method with young people. When the extension worker, whether a State extension specialist or a county extension worker, attempts to lead discussion groups, he finds that the number of young people he can reach becomes very limited. If the majority of young people in any county are to be reached, they will have to be trained to handle their own discussion. The extension worker, therefore, must know not only how to lead a discussion but how to teach others so they can become leaders. Where the term "leader" is used in this circular it refers to a member of the farm young people's group. If young people are to develop skill in the use of the discussion method they should be given every opportunity to participate in all its phases.

The Discussion Leader's Preparation

If the discussion method is to be used, the leader must first of all be sure that he has discovered one of the group problems and that most of the members of the group have had some experience with it, otherwise there will be no basis for interest or discussion. The first characteristic of a good discussion leader is the ability to discover the real experiences and problems of the group. If a leader is going to help the group to organize its thinking he first must have organized his own thinking. To think a problem out accurately, the leader must understand the various alternatives or possible choices under the circumstances, the information or facts to be considered, and the destinations at which the various choices will cause the individual to arrive.

To develop skill in discussion leadership, practice is necessary. Indeed to learn this teaching method, good demonstrations should be observed and analyzed. Potential discussion leaders should practice under guidance of a successful discussion leader, and should learn to criticize and improve their own technique. Repetition is as essential an element in learning to be a successful discussion leader as it is in any other learning situation.

It becomes the job of the extension worker to help the junior leader to analyze these situations, see the alternatives and where their application to the situation will lead.

Not only must the discussion leader have made a correct analysis of the group's problems; but the group must be conscious that the problems are theirs. As with most individuals, members of such groups do not always realize the full significance of their choices. To be sure that the group will be interested in the topics under discussion the leader should help the members to list activities and to indicate some of the problems growing out of those activities. Simply to discuss a topic without application to

situations affecting members of the group is of little value. In using the discussion method as an extension procedure, it is assumed that the groups have had experience with the problems under discussion. The subjects for discussion must relate to these experiences. The extension agent's experiences may be far beyond those of the young people with whom he deals; the young people can only conceive of the things they have experienced. If the group is to be instructed in matters in which they have not had experience, the (1) informational or, (2) demonstration method will have to be used.

The organization of subject matter for use of farm young people's groups is more significant than the technique for handling physical arrangements or for the management of the members of the discussion groups.

Selection of the Group

In most cases it will be better to use the discussion method with a group that already has been organized and whose members are acquainted with each other. However, if such a group is not available the following plan has been found successful:

To get a group of young people with like interests and problems it may be necessary to build up a list of names and addresses and to interview sufficient numbers of persons to make sure that common interests and common problems have been determined. Generally it is found that a large number of the possible candidates have never been interested in extension work. Others have been 4-H club members but have dropped out for one reason or another. An interview makes an occasion to go over problems of youth with the individuals concerned and with their parents, and to obtain an expression of their ambitions and what might be done to help. From this list, those who would make up congenial groups can be chosen.

- (1) Common interests may be enterprises such as poultry, hogs, dairy cattle, or some phase of homemaking such as clothing, landscaping, food, or larger problems such as management of the farm or the home.
- (2) In many counties groups of farm young people are acting as local 4-H club leaders or assistants. These young people make a very active nucleus for a discussion group.
- (3) Young people are interested in those of the opposite sex. A social program is therefore effective in bringing them together.
- (4) They have many other common interests, such as management of self, personal improvement or development, life planning.
- (5) In many areas large numbers of young people of this age group are giving consideration to earning their living

from nonagricultural occupations. The training and experience required and the returns from occupations other than agriculture are of peculiar importance to them.

The Group's Preparation

The discussion proceeds more effectively if there has been some previous preparation on the part of the group. This preparation may take the form of:

- (a) Consideration of some simple topics that are of common interest, if the group has not used the discussion method before.
- (b) Observations that members have been asked to make in their own community through circular letters.
- (c) Suggestions given at previous meetings of certain situations or problems to be talked over in the home.
- (d) A given topic on which individuals are prepared to open the discussion. The more accurate the facts that have been gathered on the topic under discussion, the greater the interest of group members and their chances for arriving at sound conclusions.

Discussion Aids

Physical arrangements. (Satisfactory results can be obtained only when the physical arrangements are comfortable and informal.)

- 1. A table always. (It provides a place to take notes and keeps feet out of sight.)
- 2. Comfortable chairs, arranged so that everyone can see the faces of the other members.
- 3. Proper lighting, especially at night.
- 4. Good ventilation. Room temperature comfortable.
- 5. Blackboard or large sheet of paper. (Wrapping paper has this advantage. Ideas can be taken home on paper for further study.)
- 6. Size of group - 15 to 25 most desirable number.
- 7. Time for discussion of a topic - never more than $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

In order that there may be a wide range of ideas and at the same time opportunity for everyone to participate in the discussion, the group is most efficient when there are not less than 12 or more than 25 members. Large numbers will limit the extent of participation and the training the individual receives. However, to continue with a larger group may be better than to divide it if the group is congenial.

Opening the discussion.

At the opening of the meeting the problem under discussion should be widely presented and the plan of procedure made clear.

One of the problems in connection with every discussion meeting is how to get the meeting started smoothly. Some of the methods used have been -

1. To have several members of the group prepared to open the discussion.
2. To call upon a member who has had experience or who has strong opinions on the topic under discussion.
3. To have a qualified outside speaker present his point of view.
4. To have a number of members with different opinions regarding the subject under discussion present their point of view first.
5. To have the members, especially if they have never met before as a discussion group, write their ideas on slips of paper.

Whatever method of opening the discussion is used, it must be well thought out and the technique for handling the various situations considered. To lead a discussion usually requires more preparation than to lecture or give a demonstration on the same subject.

Participation by group members.

1. As soon as the chairman and the prepared speakers have participated, the meeting should be thrown open by the asking of a question that will provoke discussion and bring out different points of view.
2. The chairman should notice individuals who are backward and take no part, and decide what procedure to use to draw them out.
 - (a) Watch their facial expression. A frown or smile often indicates that they are thinking about the subject.

- (b) Call on those who, to your definite knowledge, have had experience with problems.

"Still water runs deep." You have been keeping very quiet. Tell us what you have been thinking."

(Think up other parallels like this to use.

- (c) Restate the question in another way. No response may indicate that question has not been understood. Discussion leader should not insist on participation to the point of embarrassment of any individual member of the group. (Leader should become acquainted with such an individual outside the meetings, and become familiar with his problems and gradually work him into a mood to take part."

3. If someone talks at length, seemingly off the subject, select the one idea that can be related to the question at hand and throw it back to the group for further discussion.

4. If a person insists on making an irrelevant speech, ask him to summarize his statement. Write this summary on the board as speaker gives it, then quickly turn to the group with another question before speaker can continue. Watch the mood of the group to determine when to act.

5. If a leader expects to get real thinking by members of group he must be careful not to bias their remarks by revealing his own attitudes and decisions.

6. Discussion leader should always be listening to what is being said by person who has the floor. He never should have to ask a person to repeat what he has said.

7. Insist that all who participate speak so everyone can hear.

8. A leader to be successful must adopt a friendly informal attitude as one of the group, and not give the impression of having a superior attitude.

9. In small groups, leader should drill himself until familiar with the name of every member.

10. Side discussions within the group should be controlled.

- (a) When a person talks to his neighbor about discussion topic, he may be asked to repeat his comments to the group as a whole, the assumption being that if neighbor is interested, group will be interested.

- (b) When a situation arises where persons are not interested in discussions and distract attention because of their actions they may be stopped by quietly turning attention of group to them or, sometimes, by looking at those causing the distraction. Perhaps stopping discussion while everyone looks at them. Leader may mention their names in course of discussion conversation.
- (c) Such side discussion may indicate to the leader that the choice of topic is not within the experience of the group and a new approach should be tried.

Guiding Thinking or Choosing Subject-Matter Content

As an aid in guiding group thinking or choosing subject-matter content the leader should -

- Not challenge any statement.
- Keep own opinions or attitude to himself.
- Not argue.
- Have tentative list of questions and some possible answers.
- Have tentative blackboard outline.
- Obtain as large a factual background as possible before meeting begins.
- Not attempt to answer questions propounded by the group, but turn them back to the group for discussion.
- Give equal weight to everyone's statement.
- State proposition under discussion in such a way that it is clearly understood.
- Reword proposition if not understood.
- Present typical cases.
- Ask further questions that will bring out several solutions to the problem under discussion.
- Have members present common situations or experiences relating to topic.
- See if application can be made.
- See that all sides of the question are discussed.

Use such devices as:

- a. Advantages and disadvantages.
- b. Order of importance.
- c. Present opposite trends of thought.

- Call attention of cases familiar to members of group.
- Ask group to apply specific situations. (If the idea expressed in general terms.)
- Help to arrive at criteria or standards upon which to base judgments.
- Record ideas on blackboard incorrectly to see if they stimulate reactions.

The discussion leader before starting the meeting should review in his own mind everything that might happen during the meeting and decide upon the various methods to be used to handle these situations.

Sample Discussion Topics

The farm..

Would you rather earn your living upon a farm in your community or in a factory?

What kind of future - social, economic, etc. - can you look forward to from farming?

What is the best method for a young man to follow to get started in farming in your community?

What farming arrangements between fathers and sons in your neighborhood do you consider most satisfactory?

What renting agreements in effect in your community are practical for a young man who wishes to start farming?

Under what conditions would it be desirable to remain on the home farm?

What procedures might a young man follow to acquire a credit standing sufficient to purchase a farm?

What size and quality of farm would it be necessary to own to earn a living satisfactory to you?

What training and experience should a young man receive preparatory to becoming a dairy farmer or a cotton farmer or a poultry farmer?

How can farm and enterprise records and the farm and home outlook help farmers to improve the management of their farms?

What farm and home records are kept in your family, and how are they used or should they be used, as a guide to better management.

The home.

What is the best preparation for the job farm homemakers have to perform?

Should a young woman who does not like poultry, gardening, and livestock attempt to live on a farm?

What are the things you feel that farm families should not be expected to do without?

If you had only \$600 to spend for a living, how would you distribute it and what would govern the distribution:

What are the advantages and disadvantages of a home on a farm?

How great a food contribution can the farm make to the home?

What is the cost of a typical farm-family budget in your community?

- a. What foods are purchased by your family and at what cost?
- b. What clothing is provided for your family and at what cost?
- c. What other things does your family purchase? (Specify.)

The individual.

How can I manage to develop those personal characteristics that will make me successful as a farmer and homemaker?

How can I influence other people?

What are my individual (personal) resources?

How much responsibility has an individual for what he becomes?

How can I become acquainted with good books?

What are the relative values in living (health, wealth, character, education, etc.)?

How can I develop my resources?

What are the qualities of successful farming?

What are the qualities of successful homemaking?

What makes a worth while, well-balanced individual?

How shall I act on different social occasions?

How can I develop a pleasing personality?

What can I do to improve my personal appearance?

The community.

Analysis of county industries.

Analyses of tax bill.

Activities of county government.

What kind of community do you want to live in?

How can I help to improve the community social and recreational activities?

The Follow-Up

Not only must the person leading the discussion have thought the problem through himself, but he must so stimulate the thinking of members of the group that they will become more skillful in their thinking processes. This improvement in thinking is arrived at by -

1. Exchange of experiences, information, and facts among members of the group.
2. The relative weight given these experiences, information, and facts by other members.
3. The encouragement received to constructive thinking, rather than by rationalizing to justify certain ideas.
4. Trying out under their own conditions solutions which group members suggested.
5. The participation of group members in the discussion.
6. Verifying individuals' conclusion by further observations. Group members will not succeed in developing absolutely accurate judgments at the first effort any more than they can develop a new farm or home practice perfectly the first time.

A large part of this training in thinking should consist in using various experiences brought out through discussion to build up mental pictures or plans with reference to a future farm and home. Everyone has an ambition for himself - a life plan or scheme that determines in a large way his individual actions. The individual may not have given much conscious thought to this scheme, but it motivates his choices and decisions just as effectively as though he had given thought to it. Each new experience modifies this condition. Most persons who have succeeded in life have had a conscious plan or goal and have worked persistently toward it. If an individual is to become a successful businessman or farmer or homemaker this same persistence in striving for some goal must be a part of his make-up. Determination to earn a living through farming requires a clear idea of a type of farming, its extent and efficiency, under conditions in the locality where the individual intends to make his home. The discussion method is an effective way to make these plans or programs clearer.

The following check list has been formulated with the idea that it would be used by the members of the program planning committee. It is hoped

that the recording of the happenings at the meeting will lead them to improve their procedure at the next meeting. It might be well for the committee to confer with the discussion leader prior to each meeting with reference to various points involved in the check list. (See page 17.)

Check List for Group Discussion

Place _____ Date _____

Topic _____

Did meeting start on time? Yes _____ No _____ Close on time? Yes _____ No _____

How were seats arranged? Rows facing leader _____ Semicircular _____

Around table _____ Behind each other _____

Were supplies and equipment available? Blackboard _____ Paper _____ Pencils _____

Tables _____ Chairs _____ Light _____ Heat _____

List distractions _____

Who composed group? (Indicate total number in group.) _____

(Insert number in front of each class)

- Number
- a. _____ Young men out of school at home on farms.
 - b. _____ Young women out of school at home on farms.
 - c. _____ Both young men and young women out of school at home on farms.
 - d. _____ High-school students.
 - e. _____ College students or graduates.
 - f. _____ Farmers.
 - g. _____ Farm homemakers.
 - h. _____ Business men or women.
 - i. _____ Extension workers.
 - k. _____
 - l. _____

What preparation had the members of the group made (indicate number)?

- Number
- a. _____ None.
 - b. _____ Observation or experiences.
 - c. _____ Reading.
 - d. _____ Gathering facts or information.
 - e. _____ Consideration of situations or cash propounded in advance.
 - f. _____ Individual checking list.
 - g. _____
 - h. _____
 - i. _____
 - k. _____

What device did leader use to start meeting?

- a. Outside speaker: Yes _____ No _____
- b. Member especially prepared: Yes _____ No _____
- c. Call upon members: Yes _____ No _____
- d. Write suggestions on slip of paper.
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____

Did topic under discussion relate to-

- a. Situations familiar to members of group? Yes _____ No _____
- b. Their accumulated knowledge? Yes _____ No _____
- c. Experiences not familiar to members of group? Yes _____ No _____
- d. Entirely new knowledge? Yes _____ No _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____

What means were used to supplement knowledge of group on topic under discussion?

- a. Opening presentation by discussion leader. Yes _____ No _____
- b. Someone especially prepared within group. Yes _____ No _____
- c. Authority outside group present. Yes _____ No _____
- d. Devices for correcting misinformation. Yes _____ No _____

Topic _____

Was leader's knowledge of topic under discussion such as to enable him to weigh the accuracy of the contribution of the group members.

Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

Was the leader's description of topic under discussion such that members easily understood its limitations?

Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

Was the leader's familiarity with experiences and situations of members of group such as to enable him to use them to illustrate topic under discussion?

Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

Were adequate leads or discussion questions presented to group?

Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

Was the leader's control of discussion -

Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

Was the leader's device to record comments, blackboard or other means -

Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

Was his outline for recording these comments -

Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

What method was used to summarize discussion?

- a. _____ Discussion leader. Yes _____ No _____
- b. _____ Member of group. Yes _____ No _____
- c. _____ Each member expressed opinions. (Three most helpful ideas) Yes _____ No _____
- d. _____ Group agrees upon some plan of action. Yes _____ No _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____

Were members of the group benefiting by the discussion by -

- a. Participation in discussion? Yes _____ No _____
- b. Modifying life pattern or plan? Yes _____ No _____
- c. Making applications to individual situations? Yes _____ No _____
- d. Adding to knowledge - remembering? Yes _____ No _____
- e. Changing opinions or attitudes? Yes _____ No _____
- f. Continuing discussion after conference? Yes _____ No _____
- g. Constructive thinking? Yes _____ No _____
- h. Immediate activity planned? Yes _____ No _____
- i. _____
- k. _____

How to plan to avoid in the future difficulties encountered at this meeting?

Group Discussion and the Problems of Farm Young People

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